Fall 1997

Pacific Islands Fishery News

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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National Marine Fisheries Service
2570 Dole Street
Honolulu, Hawaii

EL NINO 1997-98: *Impact on Fishery Uncertain*

Since April, scientists and weather watchers have warned of the coming of a major El Nino episode as sea surface temperatures in the Pacific began to rise. Experts say this El Nino is larger at this stage than the 1982-83 version, which was the strongest on record.

That is cause for concern because the '82-83 El Nino was the largest in a century, responsible for causing $13 billion in damage and 2000 deaths worldwide. It is blamed for Hurricane Iwa, which devastated homes, property and crops in Hawaii.

The major effects of the current El Nino are expected to hit in December and January, when ocean temperatures will be highest in the eastern Pacific. How it will affect fisheries in the central and western Pacific is unclear.

Strange Fish Stories

There is no hard evidence to predict what will happen in any given fishery. But along the U.S. West Coast, rarely seen tropical fish are turning up and making news. In Westport, Washington, the catch of an 8-foot striped marlin made TV news. In northern California, mahimahi have turned up 30 miles south of San Francisco, as have swordfish and sardine schools. Around Santa Cruz, sports fishermen have spotted blue marlin in the area. Researchers at the National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Science Center in La Jolla said that coastal waters around California have been 5 to 6 degrees above normal -- good for anglers but bad for species such as salmon and shellfish. Mackerel have reportedly moved far enough north to begin feeding on young salmon. Dungeness crabs and other bottom dwellers could suffer because they lack the ability to easily escape to cooler temperatures.

West May Be Best

Based on the 1982-93 El Nino, the phenomenom is a non-event, said Jim Cook, who owns and operates a number of longline vessels. He said the weather actually cools and stabilizes around places like Hawaii during El Nino. In the past, fishing fleets have moved a bit eastward during El Nino. "Kiribati is where there's a lot of action," said Cook, "Fishing is also heavier around several uninhabited U.S. islands like Baker and Howland."

There could be some fluctuation in the catch of certain species, but fish wholesalers said they will be watching to see if El Nino causes any longer term changes in the fishery.

Among the large fleets in the Pacific, the 33 purse seine vessels which belong to the San Diego-based U.S. Tuna Foundation fish exclusively in the western Pacific and they have no immediate plans to move. These large vessels, 1,000-2,000 tons, will probably reassess the situation in a month or so. For now, a foundation spokesman said, they expect to see more yellowfin tuna thanks to El Nino.

Farther north, albacore trolling vessels belonging to the Western Fish Boat Owners Association are not expected to make any major operational changes because of El Nino, according to manager Wayne Heikkila.

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Pacific Islands Fishery News

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94th Council Meeting Set for Nov. 12-14

The 67th Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will meet between 8.00 a.m. and 5 p.m. on the 10th and 11th November 1997 at the Council's conference room. The 94th Council meeting will be held at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii from 12 to 14 November, 1997. The Council's Standing Committees will meet in the Garden Lanai Room on Wednesday, 12 November from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.. The full Council will meet in the Hibiscus Room from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Thursday the 13th and Friday the 14th.

Major action items on the SSC and Council agendas include: management initiatives for the developing American Samoa albacore longline fishery; international management of highly migratory species in the Central and Western Pacific; consideration for the development of a coral reef fishery management plan; revising the Council's vessel monitoring system policy to consider the release of data for fisheries research and management; and draft amendment for a limited access program for the bottomfish fishery in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Mau Zone.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Jim Cook

The International Perspective

Your Council has been involved for 20 years in promoting and implementing management programs for Hawaii's fisheries. Many of you have played an important role in providing advice and guidance to the process. As the future of our pelagic fisheries is dependent, to a large extent, on what foreign nations do toward managing and conserving pelagic resources, the Council has placed great emphasis on international management of these resource throughout the western Pacific region.

The Council has observer status with the Forum Fisheries Agency, the organization for management of tunas and billfish in the Western and Central Pacific, and that Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa are members of the South Pacific Commission, the organization responsible for research, stock assessment and fisheries development in the Pacific Islands. We actively participated in international conferences which include all the island nations throughout the Pacific and distant water fishing nations from the Pacific Rim, including the USA. In a meeting held earlier this year, these nations were able to agree and move forward in developing a Pacific-wide management regime for highly migratory tunas and billfish in the Western and Central Pacific.

For a decade, the Council has successfully managed pelagic resources in our Region. We look to take a lead role in developing management arrangements in the Pacific for the next century.

Jobs Well Done

Two Congressional staff members received high praise from the Western Pacific Council for outstanding service to fisheries at its 93rd meeting on August 19-21 in Honolulu.

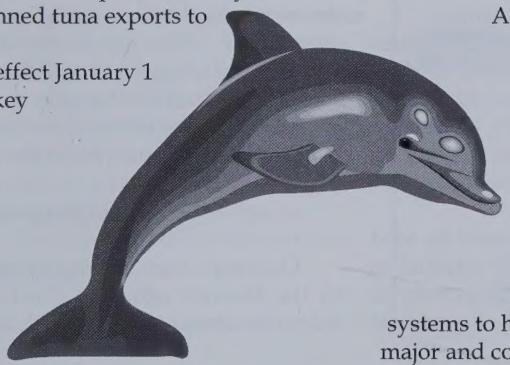
Council Vice Chairman William Paty (second from left) presented an award to Margaret Cummisky (right), Legislative Director in the office of Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye. Penny Dalton, staff member on the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans & Fisheries, received her award from Vice Chair Dr. Paul Stevenson.

Will "Dolphin-Safe" Law Cause Boats to Move East?

With the stroke of his pen on August 15, President Clinton set in motion a sequence of events that could ultimately lead to a permanent lifting of the tuna embargo against a number of countries.

By signing the International Dolphin Conservation Act, Clinton acknowledged successful efforts by fishermen in recent years to reduce the dolphin kills and injuries which most often occur with purse seining of tuna in the eastern Pacific. Embargoed producers such as Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, are hopeful that this paves the way for a resumption of their canned tuna exports to the huge U.S. market.

The Act goes into effect January 1 and identifies several key benchmarks.



In October, research will begin to determine whether purse seining using dolphin-friendly techniques causes any adverse, long-term effects on the animals. The final report is due to the Secretary of Commerce in March 1999 and will be used to determine if the embargo will be permanently removed.

The new law introduces an amendment to keep the label "Dolphin safe" until March 1999, depending on the results of the research of the impact of net fishing on these mammals.

The second key element is the ratification of a binding agreement by countries wishing to export tuna to the U.S. during the research period. The signatories would be compelled to ensure that dolphin-safe techniques as well as tuna conservation and management practices set forth under the 1995 Declaration of Panama are followed.

Countries which sign the binding agreement would be able to sell their tuna in the U.S., but during the research period, the requirements would actually be more stringent than they are now.

Each set would have to be certified as dolphin-safe by observers, as opposed to each trip now, according to fisheries legislative experts.

In a prepared statement, Clinton said, "This legislation recognizes that international efforts have been tremendously successful, as the mortality of dolphins has been reduced by more than 98 percent compared with previous levels. "Those foreign nations whose fishing fleets have contributed to this success won't have to face future embargoes imposed by U.S.A. on their tuna products if they continue participating in the international program for the protection of dolphins in this effective way", he added.

Will the West Suffer?

There has been some early fears that the large tuna seiners in the western Pacific will return to the eastern Pacific if the embargo is lifted, to the detriment of ports and cannery operations such as Pago Pago in American Samoa. But that is not likely.

The U.S. Tuna Foundation, which represents the U.S. purse seiners said its vessels are all fishing the western Pacific and are not likely to switch. The reason? These boats left the eastern Pacific because of the controversy over dolphins. They have undergone extensive gear and equipment changes to fish successfully in the west -- longer and deeper nets and the hydraulic systems to handle the bigger gear. It would take a major and compelling reason for them to undergo refitting to fish the eastern Pacific, according to a foundation spokesman.

Should the embargo be lifted in 1999, the law would still require the Commerce Department to review the situation by the end of 2002 to determine if dolphin populations are still being harmed. If so, the ban could go back into effect.

Meanwhile, Back in Congress

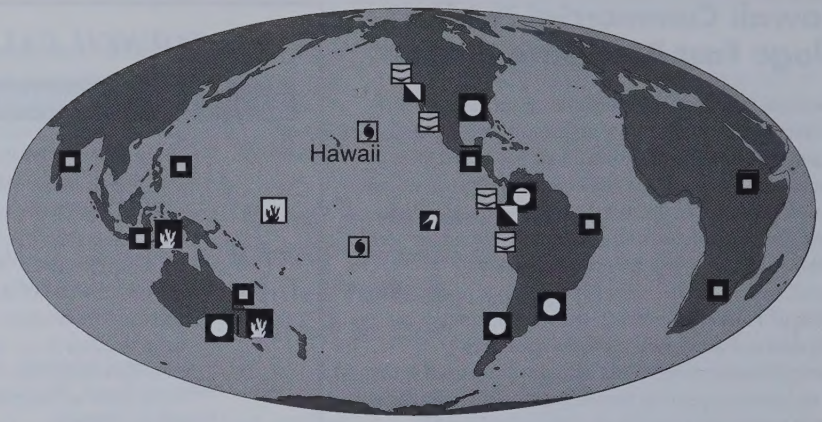
Two weeks after Clinton signed the legislation, the Senate Commerce Committee has passed a bill to tighten the definition of "dolphin safe" on tuna cans. Under a proposal by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), tuna would not be labeled "dolphin-safe" if a dolphin was found to be injured or killed during tuna fishing.

The original bill would have only recognized killing of dolphins -- not serious injury -- in tuna nets. Current law forbids use of the label, "dolphin-safe," on tuna caught in certain net types.

The bill passed by the committee was in line with an agreement backed by the Clinton administration. This would allow Mexico and other countries fishing the eastern Pacific access to U.S. markets if they change their fishing methods.

The bill calls for emergency regulations if research shows the agreement has harmed dolphin populations.

Typical weather extremes and environmental impacts resulting from El Nino around the Pacific and other parts of the world.



What is El Nino?

El Nino is an abnormal state of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific Ocean. It is a complex interaction where the warming of one -- the ocean -- transfers heat automatically to the other.

Higher ocean temperatures increase evaporation, which increases rainfall, and changes the atmospheric pressure, disrupting wind patterns and thus, the ocean currents. The freak weather that results from an El Nino episode is responsible for the greatest damage -- drought, flooding, and tropical storms.

This phenomenom occurs every three to seven years and was noted as early as the 1500s by Peruvian fishermen. Since it generally coincided with the birthday of Christ, it was named El Nino, Spanish for "the boy child."

One of El Nino's most profound impacts on fisheries occurs when the normal east-west trade winds die, or reverse, allowing the warm equatorial current to spread toward South America and California. This wedge of warm water, sometimes 400 feet thick or more, blocks the nutrient-rich cold water from rising to the surface. These changes trigger major fish movements and could disrupt fisheries for months, even years.

The search continues for the root cause of El Nino. Greenhouse gases, which trap heat, have been a popular suspect. But recently, climatologists from the Scripps Institute found that sea surface temperatures and the sun spot cycle track together very well. And satellites measuring solar radiation indicate the sun is actually hotter now than it was 300 years ago.

For U.S. fisheries managers charged with protecting Essential Fish Habitat, understanding the forces that cause El Nino could be a critical factor in formulating policy and management decisions.

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EL NINO 1997-98: Impact on Fisheries Uncertain

True, the fish are moving, but Heikkila said the 600 vessels which belong to the association will probably continue to fish in the central and north Pacific above Hawaii.

El Nino 97-98's impact on the central and western Pacific fisheries may not be known for several months. But other parts of the Pacific believe El Nino is having a negative impact. Observers in the Federated States of Micronesia and Guam say fishing vessels haved moved west toward Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Transshipment volumes of fish in both areas are half of what they were last year.

As water temperatures off South America's Pacific coast continue to increase, fisheries managers are warning of decreased catches of tuna, sardine, and anchovy. European fishmeal traders do not expect Peru to be able to meet Europe's needs. The Peruvian anchovy fishery normally supplies 85 percent of Europe's annual demand of fishmeal for animal feed.

Hawaii Commercial Fishing Village Fast Becoming Reality

The State of Hawaii is expediting its plan to construct a fresh fish processing facility on 16 acres of land at Honolulu Harbor. The new Commercial Fishing Village will be located at piers 36-38, according to Hawaii transportation officials who presented the state's Honolulu Harbor redevelopment plan at the 93rd Council meeting in August.

The Village is aimed at improving the quality and reputation of Hawaii fresh fish through reduced handling and enhanced delivery capabilities.

Nearly 20 businesses have already indicated a firm interest in leasing space at the Village. United Fishing Agency, the state's largest fresh fish auction, will eventually move to the Village from its current site near Kewalo Basin, according to manager Brooks Takenaka.

The state's plan calls for subdividing the land and putting in all improvements, including the addition of 500 feet of new pier at Pier 38, and offering tenants 35-year leases. Tenants would be required to erect their own buildings. The state has indicated it is seeking tenants whose primary business is wholesaling or processing fresh fish. Rental rates will be set after the property has been appraised.

COUNCIL CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

10-11 67th Scientific & Statistical Committee
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, Hawaii 8:30 - 5:00

12 Standing Committee Meetings
Garden Lanai, Ala Moana Hotel
Honolulu, Hawaii 8:30 - 5:00

13-14 94thCouncil Meeting
Hibiscus Room, Ala Moana Hotel
Honolulu, Hawaii 9:00 - 5:00

DECEMBER

Mele Kalikimaka

OFF THE INTERNET

SEAFOOD CONSUMPTION HELD STEADY IN 1996

U.S. seafood eaters maintained a relatively constant consumption pattern in 1996, averaging one seafood meal a week, the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) said.

According to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) statistics, per capita consumption of fresh, frozen and cured seafood in 1996 remained at 10.3 pounds. Overall, U.S. seafood consumption was 14.8 pounds in 1996, a few ounces below the 1995 level of 15 pounds.

The demand for U.S. seafood products continues strong overseas. Last year, exports of edible fishery products totaled 2.049 billion pounds valued at $2.9 billion compared with 1.994 billion pounds valued at $3.1 billion in 1995.

Imports have increased to 3.161 billion pounds of edible seafood valued at $6.7 billion.

MALAYSIA TO START DEEP-SEA VESSEL TRACKING SYSTEM

The Malaysian Fisheries Department plans to implement a nation-wide vessel tracking management (VTM) system to monitor the activities of deep-sea vessels. The VTM system, which utilizes satellite technology, will be able to track vessels weighing more than 70 metric tons operating within 30 nautical miles of the coast. The Department said the system will permit better monitoring of poachers, some of whom operate as near as three nautical miles off the coast.

INDONESIA TO BAN FOREIGN VESSELS BY 2000

In an effort to curb illegal fish exports, the Indonesian government announced that by the year 2000, foreign vessels will not be allowed to fish in national waters. Illegal fish exports by foreign vessels are estimated to cost the country some $1.5 billion yearly, according to the Association of Indonesian Fishermen.

About 7,000 foreign vessels are active in Indonesia's EEZ. To prepare for the ban, the government is allowing companies to import of new or used vessels, and is encouraging the domestic shipbuilding industry.

New Federal HAACP Seafood Rules to Take Effect in Dec.

The sweeping new federal regulations for seafood wholesalers and processors gives Hawaii the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to providing consumers with fresh and safe seafood, or it may drive some firms out of business according to seafood industry observers. The Food and Drug Administration's Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, or HAACP, will be fully implemented in December. It affects all U.S. seafood processors and importers, as well as foreign seafood processors who export to the U.S.

Fishing vessels, common carriers and seafood retailers are exempt from the new regulations.

The Hawaii Health Department, which has been coordinating HAACP training sessions, said its classes through October are full. However, if there are enough interested people (100 or more), additional sessions might be scheduled. Otherwise, it would be necessary to try and join a session on the Mainland.

The goal is to prevent illnesses caused by food using space-age technology from raw material to finished product. The burden will fall squarely on those who first receive the raw material -- the seafood processor or wholesaler.

"We (in Hawaii) have an opportunity to show that we are committed to providing high-quality, fresh-fish to the market," says Brooks Takenaka, manager of United Fishing Agency, Hawaii's largest volume fish auctioneer. Under HAACP, it will be far easier to trace the origin and handling of each seafood product. However, some critics fear the amount of paperwork required by HAACP will be too much for small operators, causing them to reduce operations or shut down entirely.

HAACP requires that each processor first determine likely food safety hazards that must be controlled. The key is the development and implementation of a HAACP Plan that is specific to the locations and for the types of products handled.

The most complete and accessible information is available on the Internet at the following web site:

www.fda.gov

Questions from the region may also be directed to the Hawaii office of the U.S. Food & Drug Administration office in Honolulu, at (808) 541-2661.

AROUND THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Tri-Union Buys Van Camp's American Samoa Cannery

The former Van Camp cannery in American Samoa has a new owner and a new name. Tri-Union Seafoods, LLC, has purchased all the assets of Van Camp Seafood Co., including the Samoa Packing Company, and has renamed it Chicken of Sea International. The cannery is now called Tri-Union Samoa Packing Corporation.

Tri-Union LLC is owned by Thai Union International, Tri-Marine International, Inc., and the Gann Family Trust. Thai Union is reportedly the largest tuna processing company in Thailand. Tri-Marine is a leading trader of raw tuna, and the Gann Family owns a number of commercial tuna vessels.

The transaction price was $97 million. Chicken of the Sea International is headquartered in San Diego, California. The cannery in Samoa currently employs more than 2,300 workers.

A Western Pacific Regional Recipe

Crispy Curry Fish

Ingredients:

1 Pound fresh fish fillet	1 tsp. Salt
1 Egg	1 Tbsp. Shoyu
1 tsp Curry Powder	1 Tbsp. Sugar
2 tsp Cornstarch	1 Tbsp. Panko (flour)

1 Tbsp. Sake (brandy or whiskey)

Directions:

Slice fresh fillets into half inch steaks. In a separate bowl, beat egg, curry powder, salt, sake, shoyu and sugar. Marinate and refrigerate fish in mixture for 30 to 60 minutes. Remove fish from refrigerator, roll in panko (flour) and slowly deep fry in vegetable oil over moderate heat. Be sure not to over cook as fish tends become dry and firm if over cooked.